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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6460  
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2883  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 9051  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2525  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7377  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6518  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1727  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0710  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3540  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001088

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT SCRAMBLES TO REASSURE GHARDAIA FLOOD  
VICTIMS

REF: ALGIERS 588

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Frustration in Ghardaia province following severe October 1 floods led some 5000 people into the streets to protest what they perceived to be the government's sluggish response. The worst flooding the region has seen in over a century took the lives of 33 people, damaged 4000 homes, and caused widespread damage to the already weak infrastructure. The Ghardaia region, specifically the hard-hit town of Berriane, was the site of sectarian violence between Maliki and Ibadi Muslim communities in March and May of this year (reftel). Fearing another round of ethnic clashes, the government scrambled to disperse the demonstrators, sent police and military reinforcements to the region, and has made significant progress in getting relief supplies to victims. Both the prime minister and interior minister have made visits to Ghardaia in the last 48 hours to reassure the victims that the central government is responding to their needs. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Heavy rains on September 30 caused the rivers of the usually arid wilaya (province) of Ghardaia to swell by 26 feet, flooding the surrounding plains. The force of the flash flood waters destroyed a major bridge on a north-south artery, claimed 33 lives, damaged as many as 4000 homes and swept away livestock and belongings. An Embassy contact from Ghardaia described the situation as, "Hell -- the waters surrounded us on all sides and swept away our possessions. We all took the women and children to the upper terraces of our homes to wait for the waters to subside."

¶3. (C) The government attempted to respond quickly, dispatching first aid supplies to Ghardaia, but extensive infrastructure damage prevented the supplies from reaching victims in a timely fashion, thus creating the perception among the population that the government was doing nothing to aid those left homeless, stranded and hungry. On October 2, a demonstration of around 5000 people materialized in the town of Ghardaia to protest the government's perceived sluggish response. The demonstration was dispersed by local police, but the manifestation of widespread public discontent clearly caused the central government to redouble its relief efforts for fear of larger disturbances.

¶4. (C) Ghardaia has been an area of increasing concern this year as sectarian violence broke out in March and May between the rival Maliki and Ibadi Muslim communities (reftel). The ethnically charged flare-ups left several dead and exposed the relative ineffectiveness of national security forces in

the province before the police finally moved in to quell the rioting.

15. (C) Soon after the October 2 demonstration, the government stood up a task force to manage the crisis and deployed the army and civilian response corps to Ghardaia. Equipped with helicopters and heavy machinery, the forces have been successful in rescuing stranded victims and in reestablishing basic services such as electricity, water and gas to a majority of the population. Prime Minister Ouyahia and Interior Minister Zerhouni have both visited Ghardaia within the past 48 hours to reassure the population that the central government is on the job. Our source in Ghardaia told the Embassy that while people are now getting most of the services they need, the prime minister was confronted with harsh criticism by victims as he toured the affected areas.

16. (C) COMMENT: The Ghardaia floods were a serious tragedy both for the loss of life and for the damage to infrastructure and agricultural lands. More than in other regions, however, the disaster has the possibility of more profound political and security ramifications. As one Embassy contact told us, "This year alone, our province has had to face a human conflict and is now confronted with an act of God -- this is a lot for one region." In stark contrast to the government's perceived silence and inactivity after a series of terrorist attacks the the Kabylie region in August, the ministerial scramble to travel to Ghardaia and demonstrate support for victims suggests that the Algerian government is well aware of the destabilizing potential for clashes between ethno-religious groups competing for scarce

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resources in the region.  
PEARCE